

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENGLISH-ONLY POLICY IN THE TERTIARY EFL CONTEXT IN TAIWAN

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Abstract: The implementation of English-only policy in the English classes at Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages in Taiwan has continued for nearly 40 years. Its advantages and disadvantages have also been debated and challenged because of the rising demands on students' English proficiency in Taiwan. This study intended to reexamine the efficiency of the implementation of English-only policy in the English learning at a college of languages in Taiwan. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the process of data collection. 279 English major and non-English major students were invited to answer questionnaires, and six participants were invited to join interviews. The process of data analysis included the analysis of both the quantitative questionnaire data and the qualitative interview data. This study found students' progress in English listening and speaking proficiency in the basic and lower-intermediate levels because of English-only policy. However, the interaction between teachers and some students was hampered because of the policy. Also, the ambiguity emerging in the insistence on using English only blocked some learners from comprehending the meanings of the texts they were learning, specifically the texts in the upper-intermediate and intermediate-advanced levels of English reading and writing courses. This study also found that proper tolerance of using both students' native language and English in TEFL classes in the way of code-switching may help students more than the implementation of English-only policy in a tertiary TEFL context.

Key words: English-only policy, TEFL, Taiwan, college English teaching

Abstrak: Penerapan penggunaan kebijakan bahasa-Inggris-saja (*English-only policy*) di kelas-kelas bahasa Inggris di Wenzao Ursuline Institute telah berlangsung selama hampir 40 tahun. Manfaat dan kerugiannya telah diperdebatkan dan dipermasalahkan karena meningkatnya tuntutan akan kecakapan bahasa Inggris siswa di Taiwan. Kajian ini bertujuan meneliti ulang kedayagunaan penerapan kebijakan bahasa Inggris saja dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di sebuah institut bahasa di Taiwan. Metode kualitatif dan kuantitatif digunakan dalam proses pengumpulan data. Sebanyak 279 mahasiswa dari jurusan bahasa Inggris dan jurusan lainnya diundang untuk menjawab angket, dan enam orang peserta diundang untuk wawancara. Proses analisa data mencakup baik data kuantitatif dari angket maupun data kualitatif wawancara. Kajian ini menemukan kemajuan siswa dalam kecakapan mendengarkan dan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris di tingkat dasar dan menengah bawah berkat kebijakan bahasa Inggris saja. Akan tetapi, interaksi antara siswa dan beberapa guru terhambat karena kebijakan tersebut. Selain itu, keambiguan yang muncul dalam desakan penggunaan bahasa Inggris saja menghambat beberapa pelajar dalam memahami makna dari teks-teks yang mereka pelajari, terutama teks di tingkatan menengah atas dan menengah mahir dalam mata kuliah membaca dan menulis bahasa Inggris. Kajian ini juga menemukan bahwa toleransi yang tepat dalam penggunaan bahasa ibu siswa dan bahasa Inggris di kelas-kelas bahasa Inggris untuk penutur asing dalam bentuk *code-switching* bisa membantu siswa lebih baik daripada penerapan kebijakan bahasa Inggris saja dalam konteks bahasa Inggris untuk penutur asing tersier.

Kata kunci: kebijakan bahasa Inggris saja, TEFL (Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing), Taiwan, pengajaran bahasa Inggris tingkat universitas

Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, is a college that started implementing English-only policy in its English classes as early as around 1970. At the time in Taiwan, most schools taught English in the Grammar-Translation method and focused on assisting students to pass the entrance examinations of senior highs and colleges. However, as Wenzao is in the Technical and Vocational system of education in Taiwan, its consideration of students' career development in a globalized society prompted its implementation of the English-only policy in all English courses.

As most students in the Technical and Vocational system of education in Taiwan usually start applying for a job right after they graduate, the focus of the English education at Wenzao is on providing students with pragmatic and solid English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing for their job requirements. In the 1970s, different from the English education at other schools in Taiwan, which focused on making their students pass the written tests in English in the entrance examinations, the English education at Wenzao focused on providing students with the opportunities to perform better English proficiency in their worksites. Instead of only focusing on reading and writing as in other schools, Wenzao placed no less emphasis on listening and speaking, which was highlighted by the implementation of English-only policy in all English classes.

At Wenzao, English is taught in an EFL tertiary context. Implementing the English-only policy diverts students' attention from merely reading English textbooks and acquiring bookish English ability to using English as daily communication skills. For students at Wenzao, English is more than a "course" to help pass examinations; instead, it has become a skill that provides them with the opportunities to excel in their daily communication with foreigners and in their worksites in the future. They acquire the proficiency to "communicate with people" more than enhancing the memorization of the crammed data to provide answers on

"a piece of test paper." For most Wenzao students, English has played the roles of broadening their views to foreign countries and strengthening their confidence after they acquire the language proficiency to perform a successful communication with foreigners, specifically native English speakers, during friends-making, daily activities or career establishment.

Because of the emphasis on English-only instruction, listening and speaking were more emphasized and fluency was more focused than accuracy at Wenzao. Students were taught to express English spontaneously. However, their expression was sometimes accompanied with grammatical errors, improper word choices or unclear and pidgin sentence structures. Improper communication or ambiguity often emerged and students were usually in the status of "rough guessing," instead of being in the status of "clear and precise understanding" between the two parties of communication.

Wenzao English teachers aimed to teach students to present themselves in English naturally and confidently, after they were educated with the English-only policy. Also, around 30 years ago, the result of such an education might have matched the demand of the Technical and Vocational education in Taiwan in forming an intermediate-level workforce to conduct international communication in the world. However, when more delicate and sophisticated English proficiency is required, besides fluency, accuracy is more than expected. Accordingly, the achievement of English education at Wenzao acquired in the past few decades has become inadequate because of students' lack of accuracy in English (Mylod, 2000), and the insistence on implementing the English-only policy in English classrooms met challenges and required reexamining.

English-only policy, as was discussed in Auerbach (1993), was both supported and challenged by different English educators and policy makers in ESL. In order to promote the national interest of the USA in immersing the non-native English speakers, specifically the immigrants, English-only policy

was implemented in ESL classes and the implementation made native English teachers take the policy as the most workable way because it is difficult for different immigrants to effectively communicate with one another in an ESL class using different foreign languages. However, the unsteady efficiency of learning English using English-only in ESL classes mentioned in Auerbach (1993) reveals the necessity of reconsidering the insistence of the English-only-policy.

Huang (2009) explained that English-only instruction improves students' listening proficiency and vocabulary. Also, students acquire more confidence when they are required to express themselves in spoken English. However, it is inevitable that students may confront tension and stress from peers in an English-only class. Specifically worth noticing in the implementation of English-only instruction is that students' proficiency levels, learning environments and students' interests may not be all well-observed and students feel disoriented in the class, when English-only instruction is implemented. Huang (2009) has suggested that in order to implement English-only instruction successfully, teachers' proficiency in rephrasing terms and interpreting ideas using a simple way or concrete examples should be strongly required. With such proficiency, teachers will be able to help students understand the content in English clearly and avoid ambiguity in the interaction between the teacher and students in the class taught in English only. Furthermore, the tolerance of L1 may also help.

According to Tien (2009), the implementation of L1 in the form of code-switching in an EFL class in Taiwan helps "avoid and resolve tensions and conflicts" (Tien, 2009, p. 188) between English teachers and learners. Also, as Tien (2009) found, it may help English teachers clearly explain English lexical items, phrases, sentences and grammatical rules. Besides, the allowance of L1 may make classroom management smoother and the teacher may also "build up solid relationship with students in classrooms" (Tien, 2009, p. 188). Accordingly, the

allowance of L1 does not only provide both teachers and learners better opportunities to complete the tasks of teaching and learning English language in an EFL context, it also consolidates classroom management and enhances the relationship between teachers and learners, which may advance the success of English language teaching.

The coercion of using English-only policy, according to Han (2004), may breed some phenomenological effects of fluency in teaching. However, more hidden problems related to lack of accuracy are actually waived from discussion because of the coercion of the policy by the decision makers and policy makers of English education at some institutes. The disadvantages of insufficient accuracy and lack of idiomatic English expression might become rooted and fossilized (Han 2004) and hard to be negotiated when they were found.

As Raschka, Sercombe, and Huang (2009) argued, trying to use only one language to teach English in such an EFL context as Taiwan is not practical because very obviously when the teacher and the learners of English are all L1 (Mandarin) speakers, the insistence on the English-only policy may meet challenges more than imaginable. It is also argued that "English-only seems to be a lazy rule" (Raschka, Sercombe & Huang, 2009, p. 170). It is "lazy" very possibly because it offers the teacher who knows only English the opportunity not to understand L1 when teaching English to non-native speakers in ESL or EFL contexts. The defense of English as the legality of English teaching may be used to cover such "laziness" and incapability of code-switching.

Tsao & Lin (2004) provided a research result about English-only instruction in Taiwan with a broader view. English-only instruction improves students' listening comprehension more than reading comprehension. However, according to Tsao & Lin (2004), the implementation of English-only instruction does not bring any significant change on students' learning anxiety, learning attitudes and learning motivation. Furthermore, when the research participants came from different

levels of education, such as primary school pupils and university students, the findings are different. English-only instruction offers a more positive impact on primary school pupils than on university students. Besides, according to Tsao & Lin (2004)'s empirical research, the influence of English-only instruction on the group of students taught in English only has little difference from that on the group of students taught in L1 only. The research concludes that it seems not necessary to implement English only. L1 should be allowed, but the allowance of students' native language should be confined in the situation when the teacher needs to explain grammatical structure and difficult vocabulary, explain complicated concepts, conduct class management, convey important administrative information, such as homework, exams, etc., fill up the communication gap and advance the interaction between teachers and students.

The challenge of English-only is specific in Japan. According to Hiroko, Miho & Mahoney (2004), "many [Japanese students] express reluctance to participate in English-only class" (Hiroko, Miho & Mahoney, 2004, p. 486). Students in Japan might not be so averse to English learning; however, they usually prefer that their English teachers use Japanese in their English classes when necessary (Hiroko, Miho & Mahoney 2004). Besides, for Japanese, since only those who may use English in their jobs need fluent English, taking English as the second official language in Japan is not an idea suitable for the Japanese society.

A similar case emerges in Korea, according to the study of Liu, Ahn, Baek & Han (2004), it seems that even though English-only is suggested in the high school English classes in Korea, "the teachers use English primarily to greet, give directions, and ask questions and they use Korean mostly to explain grammar and vocabulary," or "when they feel their students have difficulty understanding" (p. 632). In the high schools in Korea, though 50%-60% of English should be used in the English classes is considered as the goal in 2004, English-only is still making

both teachers and students challenged.

In another study by Wei & Wu (2009), a policy similar to English-only instruction was actually challenged by some Chinese students in the complementary schools in England. The students, disregarding the demand on the One Language Only (OLON) or One Language at a Time (OLAT), defy the demand and try to use their Chinese language proficiency to challenge the teachers' authority and even influence class interaction.

Similar to the above-mentioned research in various countries, some students at Wenzao College in Taiwan in recent years have tried to negotiate the demand of the English-only policy. This prompts the necessity to conduct research to understand how to reconsider the pedagogy implementation and curriculum arrangement in the English-only classrooms in the tertiary context in Taiwan.

METHOD

This study implemented both quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to find out learners' response towards English-only policy, using a questionnaire with 11 questions, in which three categories of issues were included, I collected quantitative data. The three categories were students' progress in English listening and speaking proficiencies, the interaction between teachers and students, and the ambiguity emerging in the insistence on using English only. 279 respondents answered the questionnaire. The answers on the questionnaire are on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The last question is semi-open and students may write their own answers on the last part of the question.

In order to collect in-depth answers to explore the responses of the learners who were taught with English only, six participants at Wenzao College were invited to be interviewed. Each interview was conducted in around one hour and recorded with a tape recorder. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin as the interviewees felt more comfortable with responding in their native language. All the recording of the interviews was transcribed

by the author into English in Word files. The answers of the questions provide the author an opportunity to cross-check the data in order to reach the trustworthiness/reliability of the research project (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews were conducted after the questionnaire answers were collected. Therefore, in the interviews, the results of the questionnaire were mentioned to elicit the interviewees' responses. When some related questions emerged in the interviews, the interviewer followed the answers to ask further questions in order to seek deeper interaction and in-depth response from the interviewees (Kvale, 1996).

In data analysis, the data collected in the questionnaire were analyzed in a quantitative way. Simple sum-and-mean calculation was made from the questionnaire answers and then used to conduct the analysis about the relationship of the three categories of the questionnaire questions and cross-check the data acquired in the interviews. However, in order to focus on the exploration of the implementation of English-only policy, the qualitative aspect of an in-depth analysis of the interviews was more emphasized.

The accounts of the interviewees were taken to cross check the trustworthiness of the content of each interview. In addition, the result of the questionnaires was taken to cross check the content of the interviews to confirm the validity of both the interview and questionnaire data. Accordingly, this research project used the data collected from both quantitative and qualitative method to triangulate each other to avoid the disadvantages of implementing one method only (Neuman, 2000).

When the data from the questionnaire and interviews were analyzed and presented in the section of discussion of findings, all the names of the interviewees in this paper were pseudonyms. All the data quoted directly in the discussion of findings of this paper were sent to the interviewees for their confirmation and consent before they were presented in public.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that most students at Wenzao approved the implementation of English-only policy in their English classes, and their confidence was strengthened. Confidence strengthening is also confirmed in Tsao & Lin (2004) who found the positive function of English-only instruction on students' confidence building. This is probably one of the most important functions of English-only policy in English classes.

According to the results acquired from Question 1 of the questionnaire, "Do you approve English-only policy at Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages?" 85.3% (238 out of 279 valid questionnaire answers collected) approved English-only policy. There are several explanations for the high percentage of approval. Tom, one of the interviewees, explained that "when there is an English-only program, students will try to keep up with the teacher and keep learning" (Tom, interview, May 11, 2010). What Tom tried to express is that as a non-native English speaker, when learning English, the learner has to concentrate on listening to the sound of the language. Otherwise, it might not be easy to catch what the speaker says. Tom's opinion was also supported by Nana, who approved English only teaching because it helped students acquire language fluency:

In other universities, every time students do not understand what the teacher said, the teacher may explain it in Chinese. However, at Wenzao, the teacher needs to explain it in English and it makes students able to be fluent in the language (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

Nana gave her positive emphasis on the use of English-only teaching. It indicates that using Chinese all the time when one learns English may block the learners' opportunities of forming the habit of using English naturally. Kathy mentioned that:

[i]f you study here and would like to learn English but all the time you hear Chinese, I

feel that it is of no help. Instead, if you like something and you try to be with it all the time, you will get improved [and form the habit of using the language naturally] (Kathy, Interview, May 10, 2010).

The data collected from Tom, Nana and Kathy confirm the approval of the implementation of English-only teaching in an English classroom and pinpoint the importance of forming the habit of using English naturally.

Progress in listening and speaking proficiencies

This study found that students made progress in English speaking and listening proficiency in the basic and lower-intermediate levels of English classes because of English-only policy. The finding matches the result of students' improvement in listening comprehension in Tsao & Lin (2004) and Huang (2009). Students were urged to use English only in their English classes no matter they liked it or not. Accordingly, students needed to concentrate on listening to any other speaker in the class and do their best to express themselves in English. This, in some way, made students get used to English sound and English sentence patterns. Also, under the circumstance where students had no other choice but use English, their repetitive usage of English shaped them to be more confident in speaking English.

In Question 4, "Do you think the English-only policy will increase students' listening comprehension?" 92.1% of students agreed that there was positive effect on students' listening comprehension. According to Question 3, "Do you think the whole English instruction can improve students' English communication abilities?" 85.8% of students gave positive answers.

The data collected from the interviewees reveal that Tom, Kathy, Nana and Lisa all agreed that English-only teaching enhanced their listening comprehension and communication ability. In Question 2, "Do you think the English-only pedagogy will enhance students' all English abilities?" 87.1% agreed

that students' whole English ability was enhanced. However, for Question 2 related to all English abilities, different interviewees gave different answers. Nana said:

I feel that in listening and speaking, English-only teaching helps. But in writing, it helps not much because in grammar and writing, no matter how the teacher explains in English, still, my grammar and writing do not improve so much (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

Lisa had similar opinion to Nana's; however, Lisa had her explanation:

I feel that English-only teaching will certainly help one a lot in listening and speaking. As for reading and writing, I think it requires attending the classes to improve them. But since in reading and writing, the courses are still conducted in English only, and you have to keep on listening and speaking in English, certainly your ability of listening and speaking will improve (Lisa, Interview, May 13, 2010).

It seems that both Nana and Lisa acquired progress in listening and speaking and casted doubt on the effect of English only on reading and writing. In their data, both of them seemed to claim grammar as the reason of their low improvement in reading and writing. When English grammar is taught in English only, both of them confronted challenges. Nana explained:

It also depends on the difficulty level of the grammar taught. Some just make me feel that no matter how, it is still difficult to understand. For example, in high school, when the teacher taught English Modal, even though it was taught in Chinese, we still needed to keep on asking our classmates about what the teacher was teaching (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

Nana's explanation reveals that it is challenging for students to understand some of the English grammar when the teacher teaches it in English only. Lisa was a student who spoke English fluently, but she still felt

challenged when she needed to learn English grammar in English:

In grammar, it is arguable. I may understand it, but for some parts which look similar, I may get confused. But, if the teacher gave us exercises, well, fine. But, most grammar was taught once only, and then, it was not taught again. Even though it is not taught in English, it is still easy to be forgotten, especially in the part of the grammar that usually makes me feel confused (Lisa, Interview, May 13, 2010).

The opinions of both Nana and Lisa do not mean that no learner at Wenzao acquired improvement in all English abilities. Kathy was the person who attributed her progress in English to the English-only pedagogy when she was taught in English only in a year:

When I was in the first year of the five-year college, I got only 99 points in College English Test¹ [out of the full mark of 380]. At the time, I felt that my English was very good because in the Entrance Examination for Wenzao, my score was a full mark [100] and I liked English very much. However, after I got the score of College English Test, I found that I was really poor in English. Compared to other students, I was really, really bad, but when I was in the second year of five-year college [at Wenzao], I had already got more than 210 points [out of the full mark of 380] (Kathy, Interview, May 10, 2010).

Kathy's opinion might indicate that it is possible that in the beginning or at the lower beginning levels of English classes, the implementation of English-only policy did help some students. However, in the upper-intermediate and intermediate-advanced levels of English classes, not only in reading and writing but also in listening and speaking, there are challenges on the interaction between teachers and students.

Interaction between teachers and students

This study found that more than half of the students at Wenzao felt challenged when they

needed to respond in English. According to the result of Question 5, "Do you think in the whole English instruction students will have difficulty in responding to the English questions?" 18 (6.5%) strongly agreed, 134 (48%) agreed and 83 (29.7%) answered neither. If we take half of the neither as "agree," 42 (14.9%) it will be considered positive in the answer. Then, 69.4% of the students responded that they had difficulty in responding to English questions. This indicates that more than two thirds of the students felt challenged in demonstrating their speaking proficiency when they were taught in English only. From the data of interviews, almost all interviewees expressed being challenged when responding in English. Tom explained why it was so:

When I don't know the vocabulary or when I could not find suitable words to express myself, it makes me at a loss and I could not express the meanings completely. Sometimes it might be that I couldn't understand what the teacher said and I could not answer it. Mostly, I think my problems came from lacking of sufficient vocabulary (Tom, Interview, May 11, 2010).

Vocabulary might be the reason; however, in Kathy's case, the challenges came from the ability of organization:

In a course, I understand what is taught. I know the answer. However, it is impossible for me to express it completely. That is why it makes me feel annoyed because I feel that I know a lot of vocabulary and I am good at memorizing vocabulary. But, I don't know why I have no idea about how to use the words I know. Probably I have a poor ability of organization. I scarcely have chances to practice expressing myself in English (Kathy, Interview, May 10, 2010).

Practice may be Kathy's problem. However, Kathy mentioned that Lisa usually had opportunities talking with native speakers and communicating with friends in English only. This does not guarantee that there were no challenges for Lisa. Lisa still felt challenged

¹ The full mark of College English Test in Taiwan is 380 points.

in some situations when native speakers did not understand her:

Probably they did not really know what I was talking about. Yes, and I personally feel very embarrassed. It seems that my ability is not good enough to make the teacher clearly understand me. I thought that probably I should try to improve my English and just pass away from the embarrassment in the class (Lisa, Interview, May 13, 2010).

According to Lisa, there seemed to be some ambiguity, specifically in the communication with native speakers when only English can be used. Nana's experience with the American teacher John (anonymous) is the example to support this argument:

When John asked me questions with high speed, I did not know how to answer. When students answered, he was not good at guessing what words students were using. Usually, after we found some words and expressed them, he just could not understand us. Or maybe we just understood part of his question and answered him. But after we answered, he felt confused and that made us also feel confused and hesitate in whether to continue answering him or not (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

According to the answers of Question 3, "Do you think the whole English instruction can improve students' English communication abilities?" 85.8% of students agreed that their communication abilities did improve. However, considering both the answers of Question 3 and 5, in which 69.4% answered that they had difficulty in responding to English questions, I infer that students under English-only instruction may acquire the opportunities to listen and talk and they may interpret the access to more listening and speaking as "improvement of communication abilities." Actually, the improvement could be interpreted as the improvement of communication "opportunities," instead of "proficiencies." More than 69% of them agreed that their "proficiencies" in communication,

specifically in speaking according to the answer in question 5, required improvement.

The English teacher might be able to grasp students' meaning if the teacher had more experiences of international and intercultural communication. However, if the teacher is not familiar with the learners' L1, it might not be easy for the teacher to "guess" what the learners mean when they hear or read the words and the sentence patterns the learners use. This may be further explained by the answers to Question 9, "Do you think under the whole English instruction environment, foreign teachers will be more appropriate than local teachers?" 9.3% of students strongly agreed, 22.9% agreed and 35.5% neither agreed nor disagreed. Taking half of neither as "agree," the positive answer will be 50%. Then, it means that the other 50% of students disagreed. The result from Question 9, different from the myth that English learners always want native speaking teachers, reveals a 50-50 preference, and it is also supported by the data in the interviews. Tom's answer supports the result of the questionnaire from 279 respondents:

I feel there is no difference because when a foreigner uses English to teach, the teacher is just using his or her native language. But for a local teacher, I think at least the local teacher has certain capability and is able to speak English as fluently as a native teacher as long as the teacher is recruited to teach at Wenzao (Tom, Interview, May 11, 2010).

The demand of Wenzao College may be one of the reasons that make students feel there is no difference between foreign teachers or local teachers in the college when they teach English in English only. However, according to Nana, both had their merits and defects:

I would say, not necessarily. There are both advantages and disadvantages. In the case of a local teacher, when we don't understand something, we might be able to ask in Chinese and the teacher may explain it in Chinese to make us understand it. In the case of a native teacher, when students don't understand some

words or some idea, the native teacher has tried his or her best to explain it, but students still could not understand it (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

Another interpretation is that different English courses may require different teachers. Some might require native speakers and others might require local teachers. According to Lisa:

It depends on the English courses taught. For listening and speaking, I think native speakers are more suitable. Native speakers' pronunciation and their ways of speaking will be suitable for students to get familiar with (Lisa, Interview, May 13, 2010).

Besides teachers' capability, merits and defects and differences of English courses, teachers' understanding about learners' cultural background might also be one of the reasons to consider whether native English teachers or local teachers are preferred. When learners' L1 is of a linguistic system different from that of English, the teacher's understanding of learners' English usually counts on the teacher's capability of distinguishing the differences between English and the learner's L1. It is not easy for a teacher without the background of a learner's L1 to precisely grasp the meanings of the learner and provide simple and clear explanations to students because ambiguity may emerge.

The ambiguity emerging in the insistence of English-only policy

The study also found that the ambiguity led by English-only teaching brings burden of learning and communicating to students. When students' vocabulary, sentence patterns and the background knowledge of English culture is insufficient, it is highly possible that teachers' explanation of the texts in reading courses may turn to be difficult to be understood by the students, and students' expression in writing may not be understood by the teacher either. Under the circumstance, the insistence on using English only in

reading and writing courses in an EFL context may become unsuitable. That is why, in the answers to Question 8, "When students couldn't understand what a teacher said in English, could they ask the teacher to explain it in Chinese?" 72.1% of students agreed that they needed the assistance of their native language to avoid the emergence of ambiguity in communication. Corresponding to the percentage acquired in the questionnaire, two out of three interviewees offered similar answers to this question. Tom, who had all the time immersed himself in English by seeing English movies and TV programs, was the person who felt that it was not so necessary for the teacher to explain in Chinese:

There is no such a problem. Probably the teacher rephrased the question or explanation and I could get it. But there is not anything so difficult that students need to ask teachers to explain in Chinese. To understand the teacher in English, preview turns are very important. We need to take some ways to compensate our lack of English listening proficiency. In the first class, if a student finds that he or she does not understand or cannot catch up with the teacher, then one needs to get a good preparation before coming to the class (Tom, Interview, May 11, 2010).

However, Tom's answer does not completely exclude the necessity of using Chinese in the class. For some special situations, he agreed that he needed the assistance of Chinese:

For some terms, for example, at the beginning of an article teaching, there might be some introduction about the article that mentions this -ism or that -ism, such as realism or romanticism, then it is better that the teacher explains it in Chinese (Tom, Interview, May 11, 2010).

However, in a different situation, Nana confronted challenges because she was taught by a native English speaker. She was desperate when no Chinese could be offered from the native English speaker to help her understand and communicate:

When students don't understand some idea, the native teacher has tried his/her best to explain it in English, but students still could not understand it. Also, there is the problem with communication. For example, I ever raised a question to a native teacher, but he did not understand what I was asking. Probably, I had problems with my grammar or something. I was wondering whether the native teacher really understood me or not. When I said something and the teacher heard what I said, he responded. But I found that it was not what I meant to ask. A local teacher is usually capable of guessing what I meant in Chinese when I expressed in English and tried to use another sentence or word to confirm what I meant. However, the native teacher couldn't do so and I could not ask the native teacher in Chinese and the native teacher couldn't answer me in Chinese. And I will think, oh, forget it, don't ask (Nana, Interview, May 12, 2010).

Nana's desperate situation might be released if she had had a teacher who could have explained to her in either understandable English or Chinese, as judged from Nana's reaction. Lisa's experience may explain why 72% of 279 students affirmed the need of the assistance in Chinese:

Now I am taking a course of practical grammar. The [local] teacher teaches us in English basically, but sometimes he says, "Ok, I will explain it again in Chinese." I feel it is good. When one listens to grammar rules in English, very possibly one just understands 50% of it. One might wonder where one is going to put some words. After the teacher explains it in Chinese again, it will impress us more. I feel it is not bad. I feel that for grammar and writing courses, it is suitable to use Chinese sometimes. It is a good idea to use our mother language as a bridge to help us express ourselves more clearly and learn English more efficiently (Lisa, Interview, May 13, 2010).

In the case of communication, conversational or written, the mutual understanding may count on the assistance of the understanding of different cultures

for a successful intercultural communication between a native English speaker and a non-native English speaker. If L1 is not allowed to be used in an ESL or EFL classroom, sometimes the interaction between teachers and some students might be unsuccessful and the ambiguity expands because of English-only policy.

Proper tolerance of using both L1 and L2

Accordingly, in a tertiary TEFL context, proper tolerance of using both students' native language and English in TEFL classes may help students more than the implementation of English-only policy. Similar to what is presented in Auerbach (1993), the tolerance of using both students' native language and English in an ESL classroom may allow both the teacher and students more possibility to understand each other and understand what is being taught. This is also revealed in Tsao & Lin (2004).

Students may not need teachers to provide Chinese explanation about the terms or abstract concepts as long as the teachers know how to use suitable, simple and clear words and sentences to explain complicated ideas. This is why in the answers to Question 10, 58.8% of students agreed that the teachers did not need to provide Chinese explanation. However, this does not mean that when students have problems understanding the terms or abstract concepts, they give up the option that their teachers communicate with them in L1. The findings in both Tsao and Lin (2004) and Liu, Ahn, Baer and Han (2004) support implementing L1 to explain terms and abstract concepts. That is why, in the answers to Question 8, 72.1% of students agreed that they would like their teacher to explain terms and abstract concepts in Chinese.

In a word, students may like their teachers to use English to give explanation so that they may learn to understand and express their thoughts in English fluently. However, when ambiguity emerges and students find that they cannot understand what exactly the teacher teaches and, they cannot express themselves in accuracy, they still consider taking the

assistance of their native language the final resort. Fluency might be what English-only instruction usually offers; however, when accuracy faces challenges because of the emergence of ambiguity, native language should not be sacrificed without any reason.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study found that most students at Wenzao College in Taiwan approved the implementation of English-only policy in their English classes. They revealed that teaching English in English only made them improved a lot in listening. As for speaking, they might have mistaken “having more opportunities” of speaking in English as “improving speaking proficiency”; however, it is ascertained that they felt more confident in speaking in public in the guidance of English-only teaching.

However, English-only teaching made more than two third of the students at Wenzao College feel burdened when they needed to respond in English. Some of them also felt challenged in higher level of reading and writing classes when only English was allowed because of the emergence of ambiguity in their communication with the teachers, specifically native-speaking English teachers. Accordingly, the allowance of L1 in EFL in the tertiary English education in reading and writing courses may help students acquire clearer comprehension and produce more confidence in sophisticated English expression. The pedagogy of English grammar may need more allowance of L1 in order to help students use English more confidently in formal written works and avoid the ambiguity in communication.

Furthermore, to implement English-only teaching counts on the consideration of teacher’s capability of explaining complicated terms and concepts in simple and clear words and ways, grouping students into suitable levels to avoid the burden to students in the two extreme sides of levels in a class, and the allowance of certain L1 in a course according to the complicatedness of the course content.

When a teacher is going to teach in English only, the teacher has to be able to use the English students are able to understand in teaching. Otherwise, the teacher may just confuse students and English-only teaching may not make sense under the circumstance.

English-only teaching is more suitable for small classes. It will offer teachers more chances to understand the challenges students confront, and students could have more chances to practice. What is important is that teachers have to understand students’ situation. They need to know how to teach in English only to non-native speakers. If there are 40 or 50 students in a class, they are probably surrounded by a few students who speak English well and some who do not really know how to answer in English. For those in between in a big class, the teachers might not be able take care of students’ learning when English only is implemented.

All three aspects have to be observed together in English-only teaching. The implementation of English-only teaching requires English teachers to possess the capability of rephrasing difficult words and concepts in understandable English, suitable grouping of students, and careful evaluation of the challenges of the content of the courses to be taught in English-only.

Wenzao College in Taiwan has implemented English only for more than 40 years, but not all students were able to pass the stage of ambiguity in comprehending input and performing output in English only. This study suggests that the allowance of both L1 and English in English teaching may be more suitable than the insistence of English-only teaching in tertiary TEFL education in Taiwan.

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